

It's Up to You

If you notice symptoms of a retinal tear or detachment, call your doctor right away. Quick treatment is the key to preventing vision loss from these eye problems.



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Retinal Tears and Detachment



What Are Retinal Tears and Detachment?

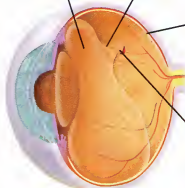
To understand these problems with the retina, you first need to know what the retina is. The retina lines the eye. It gathers light and changes it into signals that are sent to the brain and turned into visual images. Sometimes part of the retina either tears or pulls away (detaches) from the back of the eye. If it does, that part of the retina cannot gather light. Vision loss may occur. Tears or detachment may be caused by aging, an eye injury, or another eye problem.

The **vitreous** is a clear gel that fills the inside of the eye. It rests against the retina.

With age, the **vitreous** shrinks from the back of the retina.

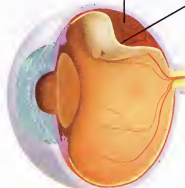
The **retina** lines the eye and gathers light.

The **retina** may **tear** or get a small hole if the vitreous pulls it.



Fluid may seep behind a tear and build up under the retina.

The **retina** **separates** from the rest of the eye.



Symptoms of a Tear

If you have a tear, you may notice:

- **Floaters** (specks or threads in your vision)
- **Flashes** (lights, stars, or streaks in your vision)
- Sudden blurry vision

Symptoms of a Detachment

If you have a detachment, you may notice:

- Signs of a tear (floaters, flashes, and blurry vision)
- An area of dark vision, like a curtain or veil coming down

Preventing Vision Loss

Early treatment helps prevent vision loss from retinal tears and detachment. Get eye care promptly if you have symptoms. You are at greater risk for tears and detachment if you are very nearsighted, have had a detachment before, or have a family history of retinal problems. If you are at risk, have eye exams as often as your eye doctor suggests.

Learn the Warning Signs

A lot of people see flashes and floaters from time to time. But sometimes these or other symptoms can be signs of a tear or detachment. Call your doctor quickly if you notice any of the following:

- The number of flashes or floaters you see suddenly increases.
- Your vision becomes blurry or dark.
- Your vision changes after a sharp blow to an eye.

Get Regular Eye Exams

Regular eye exams help catch problems before they limit your vision. During an exam, your doctor will:

- **Ask you questions.** Information about your health and your family history of eye problems help your doctor learn whether you're at risk.
- **Test your vision.**
- **Examine your eyes.** To better see your retina, your doctor may dilate your pupils and use special instruments.



Treating Retinal Tears and Detachment

If you have a small retinal hole, your doctor may simply check your eyes often. This is to make sure the hole doesn't get worse. Tears and detachments usually require treatment. Remember, speedy treatment can help prevent lasting damage to your vision.

Laser is one type of treatment that may help limit vision loss.



Sealing a Tear

Tears can be sealed so fluid doesn't leak and cause a detachment. They may be treated right away in the doctor's office or at a surgery center. Laser or freezing therapy may be used. Each of these treatments seals the retina to the back of the eye, so the tear won't get worse.

Fixing a Detachment

Detachments can be treated in the doctor's office or a surgery center. You may have more than one type of treatment. They include the following:

- The tear that caused the detachment is sealed with a laser or by freezing.
- The vitreous may be removed by surgery to keep it from pulling on the retina.
- A gas bubble may be placed in the eye. Or a flexible band may be placed around the eye. These hold the retina in place.